CHANGES IN WOMEN'S MARITAL SATISFACTION ACROSS THE TRANSITION TO PARENTHOOD: THE ROLE OF PERSONAL ADAPTABILITY

by

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
The University of Utah
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

in

Human Development and Social Policy

Department of Family and Consumer Studies

The University of Utah

August 2012

The University of Utah Graduate School

STATEMENT OF THESIS APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

Married couples expecting the birth of their first child usually wait in excited anticipation with the thought of bringing a child into the home. The arrival of a child requires extensive preparation and the experience of transitioning from coupledom to parenthood is met with major changes and challenges for the new parents. These changes and challenges result in decreases of marital satisfaction. The changes married couples experience with the birth of their first child are so profound that researchers in the past have referred to this period of transitioning to parenthood as one of "crisis." However, more recent research refers to this transitioning as a "process" or "developmental phase." The more recent conceptualization does not necessarily diminish the idea of "crisis" as characteristic of the transition, but does acknowledge that marital satisfaction may not change at the same pace for all married couples. Many new parents experience a decline in marital satisfaction; some experience increases in marital satisfaction, while still others stay stable in their reports of marital satisfaction. This study sought to look more closely at first-time mothers' perceptions of their marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood. More specifically, this study considered whether such differences in mothers' perceptions of marital satisfaction over time might be explained by examination of a number of personal adaptations. Thirty-two married women provided self-reports of multiple personal characteristics during the third trimester of pregnancy; these subjects

also reported on their marital satisfaction on four occasions across a one-year transition-to-parenthood period. Personal adaptability data were subject to a cluster analysis to examine the extent to which group differences on these measures inform changes in marital satisfaction across the transition-to-parenthood period. The findings reiterate that marital satisfaction does indeed change over time and that women grouped into a more adaptable set of personal characteristics are better equipped to handle the changes and challenges that the transition to parenthood brings than women grouped into a less adaptable set of personal characteristics.

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INTRODUCTION

Married couples expecting the birth of their first child usually wait in excited anticipation (Feldman & Nash, 1984; Rice & Naksook, 1999) with the thought of bringing a child into the home. The arrival of a child requires extensive preparation and the experience of transitioning from coupledom to parenthood is met with major changes and challenges for the new parents (Broussard & Cornes, 2009). Belsky, Ward, and Rovine (1986, p. 124) explains this experience of transition by noting that: "often unrecognized is the degree of real, and frequently stressful, adaptation that goes on when an individual as dependent as a new baby is added to the family." Belsky et al. also note that a baby is heavily dependent on its caregiver, and the stressful adaptations that come with the transition to parenthood may seem like an unending process for both parents. Hourly feedings are particularly draining for the mother, while the challenge of learning to understand each cry and other signal of a baby is exhausting for both parents (Belsky, 1984). Furthermore, sleep deprivation often sets in due to the infants' 24-hour needs (Lee & Zaffke, 1999; Wolfson & Lee, 2005). As such, what was anticipated as exciting by expectant couples often proves to be exhausting for them.

In addition to the need for new mothers and fathers to adapt to baby's constant needs, care, consistency, and comfort (Countermine & Teti, 2010), they also must readapt to one another. This required adaptation within parents' marital relationship is due to the

demands a baby places on the married couple, especially the mother (Hudson, Elek, & Fleck, 2001). A common result of this need for new parents to adapt to the changes and challenges a baby brings is that their relationship may suffer (Van Horn, 2011).

The changes married couples experience with the birth of their first child are so profound that researchers in the past have referred to this period of transitioning to parenthood as one of "crisis" (Dyer, 1963; Le Masters, 1957). In support of this notion of *crisis* in transition, studies have found that the quality of the martial relationship declines following the birth of the first child. Several studies suggest this decline in marital satisfaction is a function of violated prenatal expectations (Belsky et al., 1986; Delmore-Ko et al., 2000; Hackel & Ruble, 1992), meaning that what parents expected to happen during their transition to parenthood did not, thus resulting in a decline in their satisfaction with their marriage. However, while a violation in expectation plays a part in the decline of marital satisfaction, the term *crisis* suggests a stronger reason motivating the changes and challenges brought by the transition to parenthood. Again, the transition to parenthood is a period in life where change and challenge arise and an active reorganization is necessary in the representations of self, marital partner, and child (Clulow, 1991). Flykt et al. (2011, p. 32) also explains "the regulation of intimacy and autonomy in family relationships is a central issue during this period, and parents with difficulties in either one may experience adjustment problems in their transition." Some research reveals that martial satisfaction declines because either one or both spouses were not "cognitively ready" (Sommer et al., 1993) to take on the changes and challenges brought by the onset of parenthood. Dew and Wilcox (2011) comment that it is well known, and not just a sense of being "cognitively ready," that the transition to parenthood

is linked to the decline of marital satisfaction among women. Therefore, the transition itself is cause enough for the decline in marital satisfaction for first-time parents.

Despite empirical support for the notion that the *crisis* of the transition-to-parenthood period leads to declines in marital satisfaction, more recent researchers have referred to this transition as a "process" or "developmental phase" (Cowan, 1991; Levy-Shiff, 1994). This conceptualization does not necessarily diminish the idea of "struggle" as characteristic of the transition, but does acknowledge that marital satisfaction does not change at the same pace for all married couples when they become parents. Thus, as is common to all developmental processes, differences between individuals (or couples) are to be expected. Many new parents experience a decline in marital satisfaction; some experience increases in marital satisfaction, while still others stay stable in their reports of marital satisfaction over time (Perry-Jenkins & Claxton, 2011).

THE PRESENT STUDY

Given somewhat conflicting findings regarding the universality of declines in marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood, this study sought to look more closely at first-time mothers' perceptions of their marital satisfaction across a one-year transition-to-parenthood period. More specifically, in line with the idea that this transition must be viewed as a developmental process for which individual differences are likely, the proposed study will consider whether such differences in mothers' perceptions of marital satisfaction over time may be explained by examination of a number of personal characteristics assessed prior to their infants' births.

According to the research regarding personal characteristics, Belsky's (1984) research indicates that the general psychological well-being of parents may be directly linked to their perceptions of marital satisfaction. Along with Belsky's research, both cross-sectional (Meyer, 1988) and longitudinal studies (Cowan, Cowan, & Heming, 1986) provide evidence that maternal personal characteristics are related to marital satisfaction. For example, Russell (1997) reports that a mother's positive personality, defined as loyal, strong, patient, appreciative, and confident, is related to her satisfaction with her marriage, while other studies reveal that anxiety and depression are associated with a decrease in marital satisfaction throughout parenthood (Bond & McMahon, 1984; Downey & Coyne, 1990). Spotts et al. (2005) point out that personality influences the

course of marriage because personality often has persistent and long-lasting effects. For example, those who had "uncontrolled, explosive personalities characterized by childhood tantrums were more likely to have divorced at age 40 than those who had not had tantrums" (Spotts et al., 2005, p. 206). Additionally, a 40-plus year prospective study of marital stability found that personality traits predicted marital satisfaction (Kelly & Conley, 1987). More specifically, Kelly and Conley reported that female neuroticism was associated with negative marital outcomes such as divorce and being in a stable but dissatisfied marriage. On the positive side, being optimistic in the marriage also is important to both the immediate and long-term functionality of the marriage. Several longitudinal studies have provided evidence showing that optimistic characteristics precede marital satisfaction (Fincham, Beach, Harold, & Osborne, 1997; Fincham, Bradbury, Arias, Byrne, & Karney, 1997; Fincham & Bradbury, 1987). Collectively, these findings demonstrate that examining the personal characteristics of married women may provide insight into their perceptions of marital satisfaction. Our study intends to apply this strategy as an effort to describe first-time mothers' changes in their perceptions of their marriages over a 1-year transition-to-parenthood period.

In our study, the transition to parenthood is represented by measurement at four different times: the third trimester of pregnancy, 1 month, 4 months, and 9 months after the birth of the first child. The goals of our study are to (a) examine first-time mothers' reports of marital satisfaction over a 1-year transition to parenthood, and (b) consider the extent to which prenatally assessed individual differences in mothers' personal characteristics help to explain changes in their perceptions of marital satisfaction over time. For this purpose, cluster analysis was used as a means of identifying distinct

groups of first-time mothers on the basis of their patterns of response to a number of personal-characteristic-measures. We perceived these group differences our representation of subjects' level of adaptability and we hypothesized that patterns of change in mothers' reports of marital satisfaction across a 1-year transition-to-parenthood period would differ as a function of subjects' group membership.

METHODS

Subjects

The subjects for our study were gathered from the Utah State Infant/Mother Development Project (Isabella, 1993), a longitudinal study of infant and mother development from pregnancy through the infant's first year of life. In total, 32 women and their firstborns participated. All women were married, in their third trimester of pregnancy, and expecting their first child at the time of enrollment. Of 38 potential subjects identified through various project announcements, such as newspaper advertisements and posters, only 5 women (13%) declined to participate. Of the remaining 33 women, 1 participant failed to return the prenatal questionnaire and afterward dropped out of the study when she moved out of state. Eighty-four percent of the subjects were from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). Subjects ranged in age from 18 to 36 years (M = 23 years, SD = 4.81), had been married an average of 2.13 years (range = 8 months to 8 years), had completed an average of 14 years education (range = 12 to 19+), and were from a variety of economic backgrounds (annual family income ranged from $3,000 to $60,000 ($7,000 to $134,000 in year 2012 dollars)). Finally, an equal number of male and female infants were born to project mothers.

Procedures

As part of an extensive data-gathering effort, information concerning subjects' personal characteristics and marital relationships was gathered prenatally and at 1, 4, and 9 months postpartum. A home visit during the third trimester of pregnancy gathered data on demographics and at the end of the prenatal visit; subjects were left with a packet containing questionnaires examining personality, adjustment to pregnancy, developmental history, and marital satisfaction. Also, at 1, 4, and 9 months postpartum, the mothers again completed the marital satisfaction questionnaire.

Measure of Marital Satisfaction

Marital satisfaction. Subjects' perceptions of their marital relationships were assessed prenatally, at 1, 4, and 9 months using Huston's (1983) Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire. The Marital Satisfaction scale is a semantic-differential measure, which includes a series of 11 items (e.g., boring-interesting, miserable-enjoyable, hopeful-discouraging) to assess individuals' appraisals of their marital relationships. Summing responses across the 11 items creates a total score; high total scores indicate a greater level of satisfaction within the marriage. Internal consistencies were .86 (prenatally), .95 (1 month), .96 (4 months), and .96 (9 months).

Measures of Personal Characteristics

Developmental history. The perceptions of the subjects' early experiences in their childhood upbringing (developmental history) were measured prenatally using Epstein's (1983) Mother-Father-Peer Scale, a scale that emphasizes childhood relationships in

regard to the child's mother, father, and peers. This study focused only on the measures subscales pertaining to mother and father. The Mother-Father-Peer Scale consists of 56 items (e.g., "When I was a child, my mother/father enjoyed being with me," "When I was a child, my mother/father encouraged me to try things my way," "When I was a child, my mother/father could always be depended upon when I really needed her/his help and trust"), each of which subjects rate on a 5-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" to represent how each item characterizes their childhood relationship with their mother and father. The Mother-Father-Peer Scale includes two subscales: acceptance and encouragement. The acceptance scale indicates the degree to which a subject's mother and father (separately) were accepting versus rejecting. Acceptance indicates that a parent communicated love, acceptance, and appreciation of the child; scores in the rejection range indicate that a parent had treated the child as a burden, bother, or as a source of unhappiness (Epstein, 1983). The second subscale indicates the degree to which a subject's mother and father were reported to have been encouraging versus overprotecting. At the high end this scale indicates parental encouragement and the acceptance of the child's independence and self-reliance; at the low end, it indicates a parent that was overprotective and failed to help the child to function independently (Epstein, 1983). High scores indicate high levels of acceptance and encouragement from each of the childhood relationships indicated. Internal consistencies were .89 (mother) and .90 (father).

Personality. To assess specific negative dimensions of personality, measures of anxiety, depression, hostility, and self-consciousness were gathered from 32 items of Costa and McCrae's (1985) NEO-AC Neuroticism Scale. Each scale is comprised of

eight items, with high scores indicating greater levels of these dimensions of neuroticism. Internal consistencies for this sample averaged .76, with a range of .66 to .80 observed across the four scales. Additionally, expectant mothers completed the Hostile subscale from the Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis (Taylor & Morrison, 1980). This scale consists of 20 items (e.g., "I am apt to make thoughtless, unfeeling remarks," "I frequently tend to dominate people around me," "I have a quick temper") that women rated on a three-point scale ("mostly not so," "undecided," and "mostly so") to indicate how each item characterized them. High scores indicated an individual's tendency to be overly strict, thoughtlessly inconsiderate, and slow to recognize the needs of family or friends (Taylor & Morrison, 1980). Internal consistency within this sample was .75.

Adjustment to pregnancy. Subjects provided information regarding their adjustment to pregnancy through Lederman's (1979) 79-item Prenatal Self-Evaluation Questionnaire, which measures six dimensions of individuality specific to the prenatal period. This questionnaire uses both positive and negative statements to which subjects choose from a 4-point scale, the extent to which they do (i.e., "Very much so") or do not (i.e., "Not at all") agree with the statement as it applies to them. Scores are gathered from the following scales: Well-Being of Self and Baby (e.g., "I am worried that the baby will be abnormal"), Acceptance of Pregnancy (e.g., "This is a good time for me to be pregnant"), and Identification of a Motherhood Role (e.g., "I am concerned that caring for a baby will leave me little time for myself"), Preparation for Labor (e.g., "I feel that childbirth is a natural, exciting event"), Help/Control (e.g., "I think I can bear the discomfort of labor"), and Relationship with Mother (e.g., "My mother is happy about my pregnancy"). However, this study focused only on the measure subscales pertaining

to Well-being of Self and Baby, Acceptance of Pregnancy, and Identification of a Motherhood Role. Internal consistencies for this sample averaged .86 across the scales with a range of .82 to .93. Low scores indicate high levels of each dimension, and are considered ideal.

Data Reduction

For our dependent measure of Marital Satisfaction, the total score from Houston's Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire was used for the prenatal, 1-month, 4-month, and 9-month measurement periods. Our independent measures included a total of five composite measures: two representing Developmental History, two representing Personality, and one representing Adjustment to Pregnancy.

There were two composite measures representing Developmental History, the first of the composites, *Mother Accept/Encourage*, combined subjects' reports of the levels of their mothers' acceptance and encouragement (r (30) = .45, $p < .01$) during childhood; the second composite, *Father Accept/Encourage*, combined the same scales (acceptance and encouragement, r (30) = .63, $p < .01$) for fathers.

There were also two composite measures of negative Personality. Anxiety, depression, and self-consciousness from the NEO-AC Neuroticism Scale were all highly correlated (avg. r (30) = .60, $p < .01$) and created the first composite, *Neuroticism*, by summing all three measures together. The second Personality composite, *Hostile*, was created due to the correlations between the hostility measure from the NEO-AC Neuroticism Scale and the hostile measure from the Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis; correlation (r (30) = .43, $p < .01$).

Finally, the Adjustment to Pregnancy composite, *Adjustment to Pregnancy*, was created by summing together three intercorrelated scales from the Lederman (1979) measure: well-being of self and baby, acceptance of pregnancy, and identification of a motherhood role (avg. r (30) = .48, $p < .05$).

These composites were created not only because of high correlations, but also because of the research that has already been presented. Therefore, we believe our Developmental History, Personality, and Adjustment to Pregnancy measures are fit to describe a specific set of first-time mothers' personal characteristics, which we perceive as representative of these women's adaptability in the face of the challenges they will encounter as they become mothers. Not only does creating multiple composites provide greater reliability, but combining measures to create composites also helps to reduce the possibility for confounding variables.

RESULTS

Multiple stages of analyses were performed to examine first-time mothers' reports of marital satisfaction over a 1-year transition to parenthood, and as a means of considering the degree to which information concerning subjects' prenatal levels of adaptability allow for an explanation of differences in reported changes in marital satisfaction over time. However, prior to our analyses, we sought to determine whether maternal age and/or child gender were related to our independent and dependent measures as a means of avoiding the potential for alternative hypotheses to the study's findings. Correlations between maternal age and child gender with all dependent (prenatal personal characteristics) and independent (marital satisfaction measured at four periods) measures revealed no significant associations. Multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) were conducted for both dependent and independent measures; no significant differences were revealed. There were no differences as a function of child gender in mothers' reports of marital satisfaction across four measurement periods (F (4, 23) = 2.00, p = .12) or in mothers' prenatal personal characteristics (F (5, 25) = 1.42, p = .25). Additionally, there were no differences as a function of maternal age in mothers' reports of marital satisfaction across the four measurement periods (F (4, 23) = 0.22, p = .93) or in mothers' prenatal personal characteristics (F (5, 26) = 1.41, p = .25). Given no apparent association between either child gender or maternal age with our dependent and

independent measures, and given our relatively small sample size, both were excluded from subsequent analyses.

Therefore, to examine first-time mothers' reports of marital satisfaction over a 1-year transition to parenthood we conducted repeated-measures MANOVA for the full sample. Figure 1.1 reveals that reports of marital satisfaction across time (the four measurement periods) are significant (F (3, 81) = 6.84, p = .000).

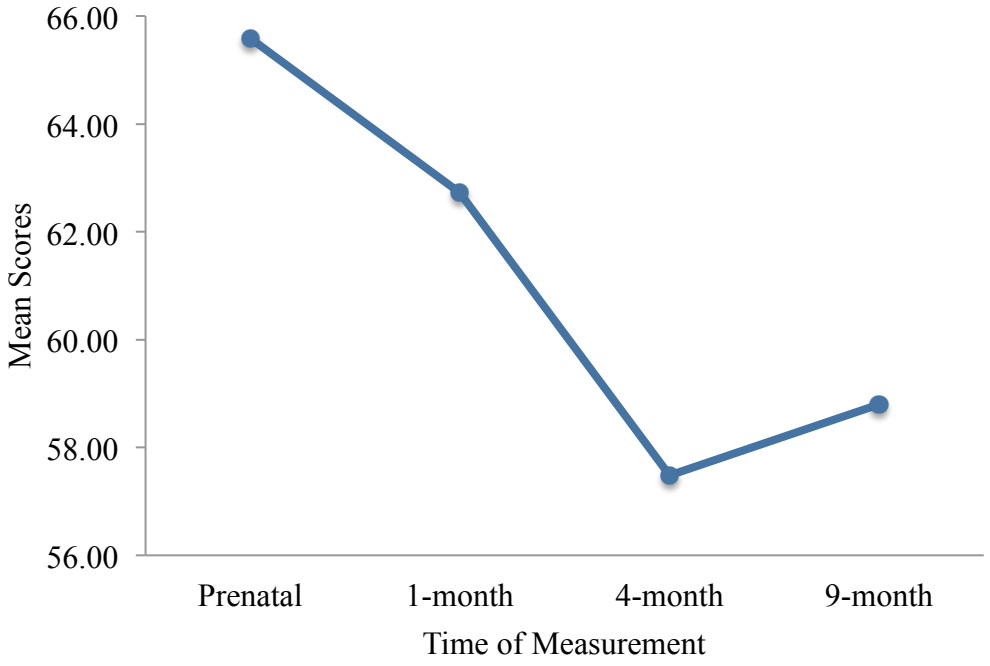

Figure 1.1
Change in Women's Marital Satisfaction by Full Sample

More specifically, pairwise comparisons reveal significant differences for the full sample in mean levels of marital satisfaction between the prenatal and 4-month periods ($p < .01$), the prenatal and 9-month periods ($p < .01$), and the 1- and 4-month periods ($p < .05$). These findings reiterate that marital satisfaction does indeed change over time and also serves to replicate previously published findings regarding marital satisfaction and the transition to parenthood (Broussard & Cornes, 2009; Clulow, 1991; Delmore-Ko et al., 2000; Dew & Wilcox, 2011; Flykt et al., 2011; Hackel & Ruble, 1992; Levy-Shiff, 1994; Perry-Jenkins & Claxton, 2011; Sommer et al., 1993; Van Horn, 2011; Wolfson & Lee, 2005;). Nonetheless, to satisfy our second goal of considering the degree to which information concerning subjects' prenatal levels of personal adaptability allow for an explanation of differences in reported changes in marital satisfaction over time, a cluster analysis was employed.

Cluster analysis was used to identify subjects with similar patterns of scores on the five prenatal personal-characteristic-measures. A cluster analysis is a multivariate technique that identifies subjects in a sample with similar scores on a set of variables and then groups these subjects together to form a cluster (Rapkin & Luke, 1993). In this case, the resulting clusters are characterized by the patterns of mean scores on the relevant personal-characteristic-measures. The clustering technique used here was a K-Means Cluster Analysis that used the five prenatal personal adaptability composites: *Mother Accept/Encourage*, *Father Accept/Encourage*, *Neuroticism*, *Hostile*, and *Adjustment to Pregnancy*.

The K-Means Cluster Analysis indicated that a two-cluster solution was most appropriate for subjects' responses regarding their individual personal characteristics.

The clusters differed significantly on two of the five independent measures by one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA): *Mother Accept/Encourage F* (1, 30) = 1.08, *p* = .307; *Father Accept/Encourage F* (1, 30) = 3.36, *p* = .077; *Neuroticism F* (1, 30) = 15.57, *p* = .000; *Hostile F* (1, 30) = 1.06, *p* = .311; and *Adjustment to Pregnancy F* (1, 30) = 25.23, *p* = .000. Also, of these two clusters of women, the difference between the final cluster centers is 4.62, indicating that the identified clusters are dissimilar within the makeup of their variables since the difference does not match zero. This dissimilarity is necessary for cluster distinction because as each center is identified it becomes the new mean for which the cluster is comprised of.

The first cluster was composed of women (*n* = 15, 47%) who responded to the questionnaires in ways that revealed high levels of encouragement and acceptance from their own mothers and fathers, well-being of self and baby, acceptance of their pregnancy, and identification of their motherhood role responses (see Figure 2.1). They also reported low levels of anxiety, depression, hostility, hostile, and self-conscious responses. We view this group as characterized by a **more adaptable** set of personal characteristics.

The second cluster was composed of women (*n* = 17, 53%) who responded to the questionnaires in ways that revealed high levels of anxiety, depression, hostility, hostile, and self-conscious responses (see Figure 2.1). Subjects in this group also reported low levels of encouragement and acceptance from their own mothers and fathers, well-being of self and baby, acceptance of their pregnancy, and identification of their motherhood role responses. We view this group as characterized by a **less adaptable** set of personal characteristics.

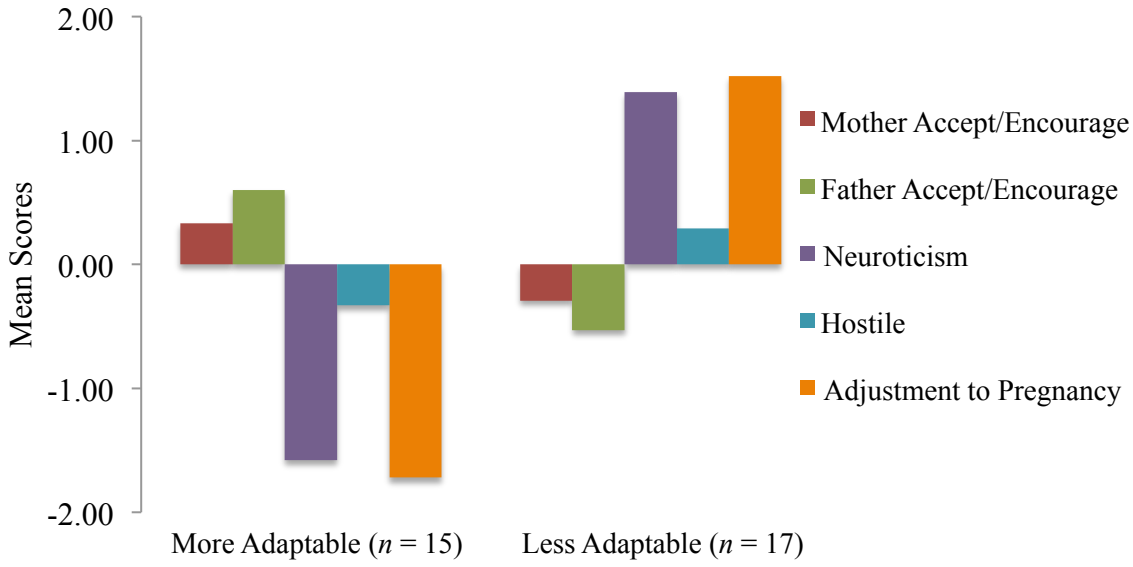

Figure 2.1
Means in Women's Self-Report Composited Measures of Personal Characteristics

We then sought to determine the degree to which information concerning subjects' prenatal levels of personal adaptability allow for an explanation of differences in reported changes in marital satisfaction over time. To accomplish this, we took scores from the prenatal, 1-, 4-, and 9-month marital-satisfaction measure and subjected them to a 2 (cluster) x 4 (time) repeated-measures MANOVA to test the differences between the clusters in the reported changes in marital satisfaction across a 1-year transition-to-parenthood period. Time of measurement served as a repeated measure for the multivariate analysis.

The major findings of our study involve the extent to which change in marital satisfaction across a 1-year transition-to-parenthood period occurred differentially for mothers with a more or less adaptable set of prenatal personal characteristics. As already stated, Table 1.1 displays the results of the multivariate analysis, and reveals a significant

main effect for Time (F (3, 81) = 6.84, p = .000), indicating that time is significant for the entire sample and that indeed, satisfaction changes over time.

Also, to note in Table 1.1 (including the consecutive table) the total of 32 women has decreased to a now total of 29 women since only 29 subjects have a completed set of data. This concludes that three women did not fully answer all specified questions within the Developmental History, Personality, Adjustment to Pregnancy, and Marital Satisfaction questionnaires.

However, Table 1.1 also reveals a significant Time x Group interaction effect (F (3, 81) = 4.93, p = .003), indicating that women comprising the more-adaptable group reported less decline in their marital satisfaction across time than did women clustered into the less-adaptable group, who reported greater decline in their marital satisfaction.

Furthermore, pairwise comparisons reveal significant differences for both groups in mean levels of satisfaction between the prenatal and 4-month periods ($p < .01$), the prenatal and 9-month periods ($p < .05$), and the 1- and 4-month periods ($p < .05$).

The cluster of women with a more-adaptable set of prenatal personal characteristics started and remained at a higher level of reported marital satisfaction than did the less-adaptable cluster of women (see Figure 3.1).

Examination of these means reveals that soon-to-be mothers within the more-adaptable group generally remained more satisfied in their marriages to begin with than their less-adaptable counterparts, and had less declines in marital satisfaction from the prenatal (M = 69.80) to 1-month (M = 67.67), and 4-month (M = 67.40) periods; this was followed by an increase in marital satisfaction from 4- to 9-months (M = 68.80). These findings suggest that women with a more adaptable set of personal characteristics are

Table 1.1 Mean Scores (and Standard Deviations) on Self-Report Measures of Marital Satisfaction

	Group		
	Full Sample (n = 29)	More Adaptable (n = 15)	Less Adaptable (n = 14)
Prenatal	65.58 (8.25)	69.80 (6.35)	61.07 (7.80)
1-month	62.72 (12.35)	67.67 (6.14)	57.43 (15.15)
4-month	57.48 (16.76)	67.40 (5.11)	46.86 (18.49)
9-month	58.79 (17.35)	68.80 (4.46)	48.07 (19.69)
	Repeated Measures MANOVA F Ratios		
	Time	Group	Time x Group
	(df = 3, 81)	(df = 1, 27)	(df = 3, 81)
	6.84***	17.71***	4.93**

**$p < .01$
***$p < .001$

better equipped to handle the changes and challenges that the transition to parenthood brings than are women with a less adaptable set of personal characteristics.

We then sought to determine post-hoc results of whether groups differ at each age of measurement and therefore, used ANOVA. The ANOVAs revealed highly significant differences between groups across the four measurement periods (see Table 1.2).

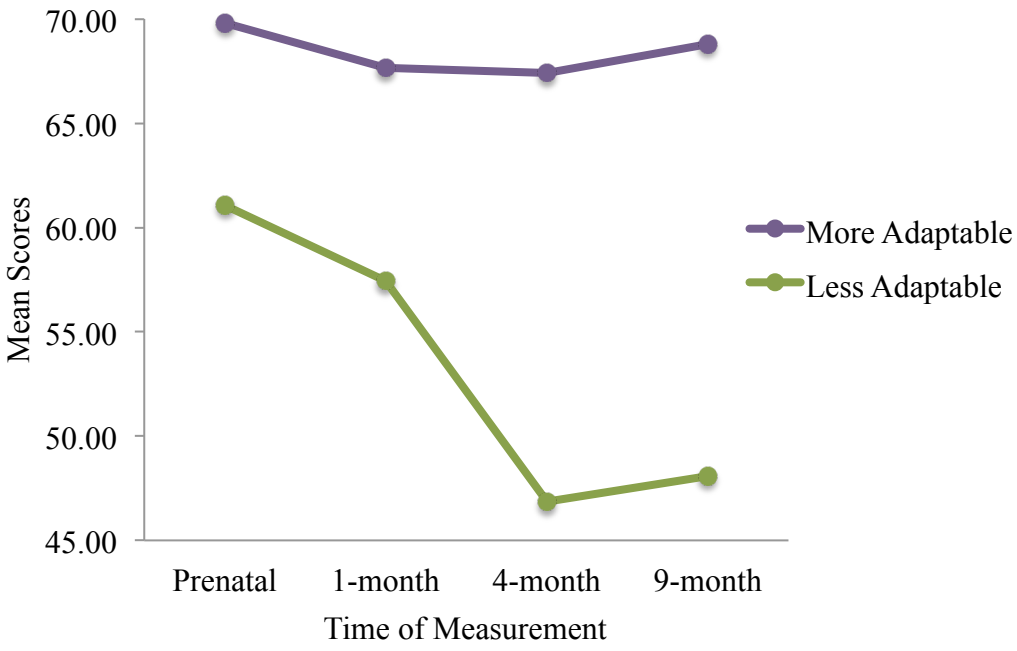

Figure 3.1 Change in Women's Marital Satisfaction by Personal Adaptability Group

Table 1.2 Mean Scores (and Standard Deviations) on Self-Report Measures of Marital Satisfaction

	Group			Group Comparison
	Full Sample (n = 29)	More Adaptable (n = 15)	Less Adaptable (n = 14)	Univariate F Ratios
Prenatal	65.58 (8.25)	69.80 (6.35)	61.07 (7.80)	F (1, 30) = 8.80**
1-month	62.72 (12.35)	67.67 (6.14)	57.43 (15.15)	F (1, 30) = 7.07**
4-month	57.48 (16.76)	67.40 (5.11)	46.86 (18.49)	F (1, 29) = 18.12***
9-month	58.79 (17.35)	68.80 (4.46)	48.07 (19.69)	F (1, 28) = 13.33***

	Repeated Measures MANOVA F Ratios		
	Time	Group	Time x Group
	(df = 3, 81)	(df = 1, 27)	(df = 3, 81)
	6.84***	17.71***	4.93**

**p < .01
***p < .001

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to address the question of whether patterns of change in mothers' reports of marital satisfaction across a one-year transition-to-parenthood period differ as a function of differences between subjects' prenatally reported personal characteristics which we view as indicative of their potential for adaptability in the face of challenges posed by the experience of motherhood. Previous research has revealed the tendency for marital satisfaction to decline following the birth of the first baby due to the changes and challenges that come with becoming parents (Belsky, Ward, & Rovine, 1986; Broussard & Cornes, 2009; Delmore-Ko et al., 2000; Dew & Wilcox, 2011; Hudson, Elek, & Fleck, 2001; Lee & Zaffke, 1999; Van Horn, 2011; Wolfson & Lee, 2005), a finding replicated here. However, previous research also suggests that the nature of change in marital satisfaction following the birth of the first baby will vary from couple to couple (Perry-Jenkins & Claxton, 2011). A baby is heavily dependent on its caregiver, hourly feedings are draining for the mother (Belsky, 1984), and sleep deprivation often sets in (Lee & Zaffke, 1999; Wolfson & Lee, 2005). Research further reveals that in addition to making adjustments to baby's needs, an active reorganization is necessary in the representations of self, marital partner, and child, all of which contribute to stress in one's adaptation in transitioning to parenthood (Clulow, 1991). Furthermore, personal characteristics is also related to marital satisfaction and

Russell (1997) reports that a mother's positive personality is related to her satisfaction with her marriage while other studies reveal that anxiety and depression are associated with a decrease in marital satisfaction throughout parenthood (Bond & McMahon, 1984; Downey & Coyne, 1990). Still other research points out that personality influences the course of marriage because personality often has persistent and long-lasting effects (Spotts et al., 2005).

Given this collection of findings relevant to marital satisfaction, the impact of becoming a parent on this facet of women's development, and factors that influence women's perceptions of their marriages, we sought to determine whether differences between women in the sample on their prenatally measured personal characteristics would allow us to explain differential patterns of change in marital satisfaction over a one-year transition to parenthood. We hypothesized that patterns of change in mothers' reports of marital satisfaction across a one-year transition-to-parenthood period would differ as a function of subjects' prenatal personal characteristics viewed in terms of their level of personal adaptability. Specifically, we expected that women characterized by a more adaptable set of personal characteristics would report less decline in marital satisfaction, whereas the group of women with a less adaptable set of personal characteristics would report greater levels of decline in marital satisfaction over a 1-year transition-to-parenthood period. Our findings support our hypothesis.

Women in the cluster with a more adaptable set of personal characteristics can be viewed as more confident in their own abilities as a woman, mother, and wife. This cluster of women anticipated the arrival of their baby with more excitement, and was more prepared for baby to arrive. These women seemed assured of themselves as soon-

to-be mothers and were more positive about their own mothering abilities and how they would deal with the challenge of parenthood. Since they were less anxious, hostile, depressed, or self-conscious, they were better able to deal positively with everyday general circumstances. Their own childhood upbringings were a source of encouragement and acceptance to who they are as an adult and therefore, confidence in their own abilities to mother their baby well or to be a loving, supportive wife seems reasonable. Researchers have also reported on how personal characteristics like optimism within marriage is important to both the immediate and long-term functionality of the marriage (Kelly & Conley, 1987).

Conversely, we view the women in the cluster with a less adaptable set of personal characteristics as much less confident in their abilities. This cluster of women anticipated the arrival of their baby with greater difficulty, and seemed less prepared for baby. In fact, several authors have suggested that low self-esteem individuals are likely to self-handicap more regularly than high self-esteem individuals because low self-esteem individuals doubt their ability to be successful (Martin & Brawley, 2002; Prapavessis & Grove, 1998; Snyder & Higgins, 1988). Therefore, these women seemed more unsure of themselves as soon-to-be mothers and were more negative about their own mothering abilities and how they would deal with parenthood. They also are likely to have a harder time dealing with general circumstances since they are more likely to become anxious, hostile, depressed, or self-conscious. The childhood upbringings for this group of women were not a source of encouragement or acceptance of who they are as an adult and therefore, confidence in their own abilities to mother their baby well or to be a loving, supportive wife seems unattainable. This view is not only difficult to break,

but according to Reck et al. (2012), the more negative the emotional state, the more likely it is that failure will be expected and the lower assessments of one's own self-effectiveness will be. We are not suggesting that this cluster of women desires failure, but research does suggest that, whereas people with low self-esteem want to succeed as much as people with high self-esteem, they are simply less confident that they will be able to do so (Coudevylle et al., 2011).

Furthermore, Lawrence et al. (2010) point out that spouses who were relatively more satisfied in their marital satisfaction prenatally tended to remain relatively more satisfied after their baby's birth, which explains why our clusters, while both decline at the birth of their first baby, begin at different marginal means prenatally and all throughout the remaining three measurements in time.

CONCLUSION

There are some limitations to this study. First, the data were gathered from the 1984 Utah State Infant/Mother Development Project; however, the measures employed are still commonly used in even the most current of studies. There is not anything about the importance of the constructs or the research questions that is likely to have changed from 1984 to today. Furthermore, in the replication of what previous research has found regarding the decline in marital satisfaction at the birth of the first child, the 1984 data is still in line with even the more recent research. Second, the ability to generalize to the larger population is limited due to our sample size (n = 29) and the dominant religious affiliation. Since 84% of our sample self-reports belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), the possibility to present our findings solely based on an LDS population can be considered. However, the same could be said for the LDS population as was said for the 1984 data set. Since our full sample findings still reiterate what recent declines in marital satisfaction has concluded for general population samples, our highly LDS sample still follows suite. Third, there can be some pushback to our study regarding men and their perceptions of marital satisfaction. Since our study does not include men, we understand that information regarding men's perceptions of marital satisfaction and their role of personal adaptability would benefit studies conducted on the transition to parenthood. However, for future research and implications, a study conducted on men's

perceptions of marital satisfaction and the role of their own personal characteristics would enrich the current research on the transition to parenthood, marital satisfaction, and would even benefit our own current findings on the changes that marital satisfaction undergoes.

Furthermore, while our study does present us with some limitations our strengths to our overall study and findings outweigh them. The use of the repeated marital satisfaction measure is a great strength since it provides us the opportunity to consider change in this important area of adult development. While the perceptions of our subjects' marital satisfaction changes throughout all four periods in time, the way we measure it remains constant, which increases our study's reliability. Also, the high number of personal-characteristic-measures and the many measurements used to obtain them adds to the strengths of our study. We not only took one aspect of women's Personality, Developmental History, or Adjustment to Pregnancy but took into account all aspects with the keen eye for data reduction to ensure greater reliability. More specifically, the Developmental History, Personality, and Adjustment to Pregnancy composites that were created were not created based upon what we assumed would capture a set of personal characteristics, but previous research shows that anxiety, depression, hostility, and self-consciousness measures personality (e.g., Bond & McMahon, 1984; Downey & Coyne, 1990; Kelly & Conley, 1987; Russell, 1997), a sense of preparation during pregnancy as soon-to-be mothers, well-being of self and baby, and an identification of the motherhood role measures an adjustment to pregnancy (e.g., Mangelsdorf et al., 1990; Sommer et al., 1993), and childhood relationships help

measure secure and insecure attachment aspects of developmental history (e.g., Belsky, 1984; Ricks, 1985).

In conclusion, our study adds to the current research on the transition to parenthood and marital satisfaction with an intervention potential. Our findings on the role of personal adaptability allow for the general ability to foresee the hardships and harmonies a marital relationship will endure. Individual personal characteristics tell a great deal about our subjects and how they respond in their marital satisfaction to the changes and challenges that parenthood brings. Perhaps with these findings, married couples will be more prepared to take on those changes and challenges. Knowing how individual personal characteristics affect the starting points in marital satisfaction can help a new mother recognize how her own set of personal characteristics plays a role. A new mother can recognize that not only did women in the more-adaptable set of personal characteristics begin at a more satisfied place in their marriage than did women with the less-adaptable set of personal characteristics, but that her ability to think and be more positive and optimistic only provides benefit to herself, marriage, and baby.

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